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**HORACE GREELEY AND THE WORKING CLASS
ORIGINS OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY**

BY

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HORACE GREELEY AND THE WORKING CLASS ORIGINS OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

THE French are a nation of philosophers. Starting with a theory of the rights of man, they build up a logical system. Then a revolution, and the theory goes into practice. Next a *coup d'état*, an emperor.

The English are a nation without too much philosophy or logic. They piece out their constitution at the spot where it becomes tight, and their nobility gracefully gives up its ancient privileges in exchange for land values. They are practical, opportunist, unlogical.

The Americans are French in their logic and English in their use of logic. They announce the universal rights of man and then enact into law enough to augment the rights of property. They have had in their history three great periods of this philosophizing on innate and inalienable rights: the period of the constitution, the decade of the forties, and to-day.

The forties far outran the other periods in its unbounded loquacity. The columns of advertisements in a newspaper might announce on Monday night a meeting of the anti-slavery society; Tuesday night, the temperance society; Wednesday night, the Graham bread society; Thursday night, a phrenological lecture; Friday night, an address against capital punishment; Saturday night, the "Association for Universal Reform." Then there were all the missionary societies, the woman's rights societies, the society for the diffusion of bloomers, the séances of spiritualists, the "associationists," the land reformers—a medley of movements that found the week too short. Thirty colonies of idealists, like the Brook Farm philosophers, went off by themselves to solve the problem of social existence in a big family called a Phalanx. The Mormons gathered themselves together to reconstitute the ten lost tribes. Robert Owen expounded communism to a joint session of the United States Senate and House of Representatives. It was the golden age

of the talk-fest, the lyceum, the brotherhood of man—the “hot air” period of American history.

Fifty years before had been an age of talk. Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine had filled the young nation's brain with the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This second era of talk had also its prophet. Horace Greeley was to the social revolution of the forties what Thomas Jefferson was to the political revolution of 1800. He was the *Tribune* of the People, the spokesman of their discontent, the champion of their nostrums. He drew the line only at spirit rappings and free love.

This national palaver was partially checked by the fugitive slave law of 1850. The spectacle of slave-drivers, slave rescues and federal marshals at men's doors turned discussion into amazement. The palaver stopped short in 1854 with the Kansas-Nebraska bill. That law marked off those territories for a free fight for land between slave-owners and small farmers. On this land issue the Republican party suddenly appeared. Its members came together by a magic attraction, as crystals appear in a chilled solution. Not one man nor one set of men formed the party, though there are many claimants for the honor of first suggesting the name or calling the first meeting that used the name. The fluid solution was there, and when the chill came the crystals formed. It was the fifteen years of revolutionary talk that made the party possible. Men's minds had been unsettled. Visions of a new moral world had come down upon them. Tradition had lost its hold and transition its terrors.

We hear much nowadays of the “economic interpretation of history.” Human life is viewed as a struggle to get a living and to get rich. The selfishness of men hustling for food, clothing, shelter and wealth determines their religion, their politics, their form of government, their family life, their ideals. Thus economic evolution produces religious, political, domestic, philosophical evolution. All this we may partly concede. But certainly there is something more in history than a blind surge. Men act together because they see together and believe together. An inspiring idea, as well as care for the

next meal, makes history. It is when such an idea coincides with an economic want, and the two corroborate each other, that the mass of men begins to move. The crystals then begin to form; evolution quickens into revolution; history reaches one of its crises.

For ideas, like methods of getting a living, have their evolution. The struggle for existence, the elimination of the unfit, the survival of the fit, control these airy exhalations from the mind of man as they control the more substantial framework of his existence. The great man is the man in whose brain the struggling ideas of the age fight for supremacy until the survivors come out adapted to the economic struggle of the time. Judged by this test, Horace Greeley was the prophet of the most momentous period of our history. The evolution of his ideas is the idealistic interpretation of our history.

Greeley's life was itself a struggle through all the economic oppressions of his time. In his boyhood his father had been reduced by the panic of 1819 from the position of small farmer to that of day laborer. The son became an apprentice in a printing office, then a tramp printer, and when he drifted into New York in 1831 he found himself in the midst of the first workingmen's political party with its first conscious struggle in America for the rights of labor.¹ Pushing upwards as publisher and editor, the panic of 1837 brought him down near to bankruptcy, but the poverty of the wage-earners about him oppressed him more than his own. "We do not want alms," he heard them say; "we are not beggars; we hate to sit here day by day idle and useless; help us to work—we want no other help; why is it that we can have nothing to do?"² Revolting against this "social anarchy," as he called it, he espoused socialism and preached protectionism. This was the beginning of his "isms." Not that he had been immune before to cranky notions. When only a boy of thirteen he broke away from the unanimous custom of all classes, ages and both sexes by resolv-

¹ "The Workingmen's Party of New York City," 1829-1831. *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*, vol. xxii (September, 1907), p. 401.

² *Recollections of a Busy Life*, p. 145.

ing never again to drink whiskey.¹ When "Doctor" Graham proclaimed vegetarianism in 1831 he forthwith became an inmate of a Graham boarding-house.² But these were personal "isms." They bothered nobody else. Not until the long years of industrial suffering that began in 1837 did his "isms" become gospels and his panaceas propaganda. His total abstinence of 1824 became prohibitory legislation in 1850. His vegetarianism of the thirties became abolition of capital punishment in the forties. The crank became the reformer, when once the misery and helplessness of the workers cried aloud to him.

Greeley's "isms" are usually looked upon as the amiable weaknesses of genius. They were really the necessary inquiries and experiments of the beginnings of constructive democracy. Political democracy theretofore had been negative. Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson needed no creative genius to assert equal rights. They needed only to break down special privilege by widening the rights that already existed. Jefferson could frame a bill of rights, but he could not construct a constitution. Jackson could kill a "monster" bank, but he could not invent a people's control of the currency. Negative democracy in 1776, in 1800, in 1832 had triumphed. It had done its needful work, but its day was ended when a thousand wild-cat banks scrambled into the bed of the departed monster. Political democracy went bankrupt when the industrial bankruptcy of 1837 exposed its incapacity. It had vindicated equal rights, but where was the bread and butter? The call of the time was for a new democracy—one that should be social and economic rather than political, constructive rather than negative; whose motto should be *reform*, not repeal; *take hold*, not let alone.

But there were no examples or precedents of such a democracy. The inventor of a sewing machine or the discoverer of a useful chemical compound endures hundreds of failures before his idea works. But his failures are suffered at home. The world does not see them. Only his success is patented.

¹ Recollections of a Busy Life, p. 98.

² Recollections, p. 103.

But the social inventor **must** publish his ideas before he knows whether they will work. He **must** bring others to his way of thinking before he can even start his **experiment**. The world is taken into his secret while he is feeling his **way**. They see his ideas in the "ism" stage. To the negative democrat **this** brings no discredit: he has no device to offer. To the constructive democrat it brings the stigma of faddism. The conservatives see in him not only the radical but also the crank with a machine that might possibly work.

Greeley's *Tribune*, prior to 1854, was the first and only great vehicle this country has known for the ideas and experiments of constructive democracy. The fact that the circulation of the newspaper doubled and redoubled beyond anything then known in journalism, and in the face of ridicule heaped on virulence, proves that the nation, too, was feeling its way towards this new democracy.

Naturally enough, Greeley was a puzzle both to the radicals and to the standpats of his day. The *Working Man's Advocate*¹ said of him:

If ever there was a nondescript, it is Horace Greeley. One night you may hear him make a patriotic speech at a Repeal² meeting. The next day, he will uphold a labor-swindling, paper-money system . . . We should be sorry to be driven to the conclusion that such a man could be actuated only by paltry partyism.

The Abolitionists were incensed when he wrote to the Anti-Slavery Convention at Cincinnati:

If I am less troubled concerning the Slavery prevalent in Charleston or New Orleans, it is because I see so much slavery in New York, which appears to claim my first efforts . . . Wherever the ownership of the soil is so engrossed by a small part of the community, that the far larger number are compelled to pay whatever the few may see fit to exact for the privilege of occupying and cultivating the earth, there is something very like Slavery . . . Wherever opportunity to labor is obtained with difficulty, and is so deficient that the employing class may virtually

¹ June 29, 1844, p. 3, c. 4.

² Repeal of the Act uniting Ireland with England.

prescribe their own terms and pay the Laborer only such share as they choose of the product, there is a very strong tendency to Slavery.¹

The Whigs and protectionists used him, but dreaded him. The *Express* charged him with

attempting incessantly . . . to excite the prejudices of the poor against the rich, and in the general, to array one class of society against the other . . . We charge the *Tribune* . . . with representing constantly that there is a large amount of suffering arising from want of employment, and that this employment the rich might give. We charge the *Tribune* with over-rating entirely the suffering of the poor. . . . all of which tallies with, and is a portion of the very material, which our opponents use to prejudice the poor against the Whigs as a party.²

Two years after this attack by the *Express*, the *Courier* read him out of the party:

There can be no peace in the Whig ranks while the New York *Tribune* is continued to be called Whig, . . . The *principles* of the Whig party are well defined; They are *conservative* and inculcate a regard for the laws and support of all established institutions of the country. They eschew *radicalism* in every form; they sustain the constitution and the laws; they foster a spirit of *patriotism* . . . The better way for the *Tribune* would be at once to admit that it is only Whig on the subject of the Tariff . . . and then devote itself to the advocacy of Anti-Rent, Abolition, Fourierite and Vote-yourself-a-farm doctrines.³

These quotations give us the ground of Greeley's "isms"—the elevation of labor by protecting and reorganizing industry. Even the protective tariff, favored by the Whigs, was something different in his hands. The tariff arguments of his boyhood had been capitalistic arguments. Protect capital, their spokesmen said, because wages are too high in this country. Eventually wages will come towards the European level and we shall not need protection. Greeley reversed the plea: protect the

¹ *Tribune*, June 20, 1845, p. 1, c. 3.

² *Tribune*, August 5, 1845, p. 2, c. 2.

³ *Courier and Enquirer*, August 14 '847; quoted in *Weekly Tribune*, August 21, 1847, p. 3, c. 5.

wage-earner, he said, in order that he may rise above his present condition of wages slavery. The only way to protect him against the foreign pauper is to protect the price of his product. But, since capital owns and sells his product, we needs must first protect capital. This is unfortunate, and we must help the laborer as soon as possible to own and sell his product himself. "We know right well," he says,¹ "that a protective tariff cannot redress all wrongs . . . The extent of its power to benefit the Laborer is limited by the force and pressure of *domestic* competition, for which Political Economy has as yet devised no remedy"

Here was the field for his socialism. It would do for domestic competition what protection would do for foreign competition. Protectionism and socialism were the two wheels of Greeley's bicycle. He had not learned to ride on one.

But the socialism which Greeley espoused would not be recognized to-day. It is now condescendingly spelled "utopianism." He felt that the employers were victims of domestic competition just as were the laborers, and he assumed that they would be just as glad as the laborers to take something else. What he offered to both was a socialism of class harmony, not one of class struggle.

In the idealistic interpretation of history there are two kinds of idealism—a higher and a lower. Greeley's significance is the struggle of the two in his mind, the elimination of the unfit from each and the survival and coalescence of the fit in the Republican party. The higher idealism came to him through the transcendental philosophers of his time. The lower came from the working classes. The higher idealism was humanitarian, harmonizing, persuasive. The lower was class-conscious, aggressive, coercive. The higher was a plea for justice; the lower a demand for rights. In 1840 Greeley was a higher idealist. In 1847 he had shaved down the higher and dovetailed in the lower. In 1854 the Republican party built both into a platform.

Let us see the origins of these two levels of idealism before they came to Greeley.

¹ *Tribune*, March : , 1845, p. 2, c. 2.

Boston, we are told, is not a place—it is a state of mind. But every place has its state of mind. The American pioneer, in his frontier cabin, in the rare moments which his battle with gigantic nature leaves free for reflection, contemplates himself as a trifle in a succession of accidents. To him comes the revivalist, with his faith in a God of power and justice, and the pioneer enters upon a state of mind that constructs order out of accident and unites him with the almighty ruler of nature. This was the state of mind of Boston when Boston was Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colony.

But Massachusetts grew in wealth. Wealth is merely nature subdued to man. Capital is the forces of nature taking orders from property owners. God is no longer appreciated as an ally for helpless man. The revivalist becomes the priest and the protector of capital.

But now a new contest begins. Capital requires labor to utilize it. Labor depends on capital for a living. The contest is not between man and nature, but between man and the owner of capitalized nature. Boston saw the first outbreaks of the struggle in 1825 and in 1832. In the former year the house carpenters, in the latter year the ship carpenters, determined that no longer would they work from sunrise to sunset. They conspired together and quit in a body. In the former year the capitalists, with Harrison Gray Otis at their head, in the latter year the merchant princes whose ships traversed the globe, took counsel together and published in the papers their ultimatum requiring their workmen to continue as before from dawn to dark.¹ Losing their contention, the workmen again in 1835 began a general strike for the ten-hour day throughout the Boston district, only again to lose. Meanwhile the factory system had grown up at Lowell and other places, with its women and children on duty thirteen and fourteen hours a day, living in company houses, eating at the company table and required to attend the company church. While some of the ten-hour strikes of 1835 had been successful in Philadel-

¹ *Columbian Centinel*, April 20, 23, 1825; *Independent Chronicle*, May 19, 23, 26, 30, 1832.

phia and in New York, the working people of New England were doomed to the long day for another fifteen years.

It was in the midst of this economic struggle that unitarianism and transcendentalism took hold of the clergy. These movements were a revolt against the predicament in which the God of nature had unwittingly become the God of capital. They were a secession back to the God of man. At first the ideas were transcendental, metaphysical, allegorical, harmless. This was while the workingmen were aggressive and defiant in their demands and strikes. But, after 1837 and during the seven years of industrial depression and helplessness of the workingmen following that year of panic, transcendentalism became pragmatic. Its younger spokesmen allied themselves with labor. They tried to get the same experience and to think and feel like manual workers. Brook Farm was the zealous expression in 1842 of this struggle for reality and for actual unity; and after 1843 the Brook Farm representatives began to show up at the newly-organized New England and New York conventions of workingmen, calling themselves also by the lofty name of "working men" delegates.

But this was not enough. Reality demanded more than unity of sentiment. It demanded reconstruction of society on the principle of unity. At this juncture, 1840, Albert Brisbane came forward with his Americanization of Charles Fourier's scheme of social reorganization. Here was a definite plan, patterned on what seemed to be a scientific study of society and of psychology. Brook Farm welcomed it and tried it. Greeley clothed himself with it as gladly as Pilgrim put on the armor after emerging from the slough of despond. He opened the columns of the *Tribune* to Brisbane. He became a director of the North American Phalanx, president of the national society of Associationists (Fourierists), editorial propagandist and platform expounder. Total reorganization of society based on harmony of interest; brotherhood of capital, labor and ability; a substitute for the competition which enslaved labor in spite of the natural sympathy of the capitalist for his oppressed workmen; faith in the goodness of human nature if scientifically directed—these were the exalted ideas and naïve assumptions

that elicited the devotion of Greeley and his fellow disciples of the gospel of transcendentalism.

Two things disabused his mind. One was the actual failure and bankruptcy of his beloved phalanxes; the other was the logic and agitation of the workingmen. The higher idealism dissolved like a pillar of cloud, but it had led the way to the solid ground of the lower idealism. What were the origins of this lower idealism?

Three years ago, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, in England, in the company of a workingman official of a trade union, I visited the thousand acres of moorland belonging to the mediæval city and now kept open as a great playground within the modern city. My trade-union official showed me the thousands of workingmen and their families enjoying themselves in the open air. I asked him about the fifty or a hundred cows that I saw calmly eating grass in the midst of this public park. He explained that these cattle belonged to the descendants of the ancient freemen of Newcastle, who, in return for defending the town against the Scots, had been granted rights of pasturage outside the town. He said there had recently been a great struggle in Newcastle, when these freemen wanted to enclose the moor, to lease it for cultivation and to divide the rents among themselves. The workingmen of the city rose up as one man and stopped this undertaking. But they could not get rid of the cows.

One hundred and thirty years before this time, in the year 1775, Newcastle had seen a similar struggle. At that time the freemen were successful; they succeeded in having the rentals from a part of the moor, which had been enclosed and leased, paid over in equal parts to each of them. Thomas Spence, netmaker, thereupon conceived an idea. He read a paper before the Philosophical Society of Newcastle, proposing that all the land of England should be leased and the proceeds divided equally among all the people of England. He was promptly expelled from the Philosophical Society. He went to London and published his scheme in a book.¹ In 1829 the

¹ J. M. Davidson, *Four Precursors of Henry George*, pp. 26 *et seq.* Spence's book is reprinted by E. W. Allen, (London, 1882), under the title, *The Nationalization of Land, 1775 and 1882.*

book came to New York and furnished the platform for the first workingmen's political party.¹ This party Americanized Spence by amending the Declaration of Independence. They made it read: "All men are equal, and have an inalienable right to life, liberty and *property*."

George Henry Evans, also Englishman by birth but American by childhood, and by apprenticeship in a printing-office at Ithaca, started a paper, the *Working Man's Advocate*, in 1829, and became the thinker of the workingmen's party. Before he began to think he adopted the motto of the party as the motto of his paper: "All children are entitled to equal education; all adults to equal property; and all mankind to equal privileges." He soon saw his mistake, as did most of the other workingmen. Every individual has a right to an unlimited amount of that kind of property which he produces by his own labor and without aid from the coerced labor of others. Such an unlimited right excludes equality, and equal right to property can therefore be asserted only as regards that which is not the product of his own or other's labor, namely, land. But the holders of the existing private property in land could not be displaced without a violent revolution. This Evans saw from the violent attacks made on him and the workingmen's party. But there was an immense area still belonging to the people and not yet divided. This was the public domain. There man's equal right to land could be asserted. He sent marked copies of his paper to Andrew Jackson in 1832, before Jackson's message on the sale of the public lands. The workingmen's party disappeared and was followed by the trades' unions of 1835 and 1836. The sudden rise of prices and the increased cost of living compelled labor to organize and strike throughout the eastern cities, from Washington to Boston. These strikes were for the most part successful; but the workmen saw prices and rents go up and swallow more than the gains achieved by striking. Evans pointed out the reason why their efforts were futile. The workingmen were bottled up in the cities. Land speculation kept them from taking up vacant land near by or in the West.

¹ *Working Man's Advocate*, June 8, 1844, p. 1, c. 1.

If they could only get away and take up land, then they would not need to strike. Labor would become scarce. Employers would advance wages and landlords would reduce rents. Not for the sake of those who moved West did Evans advocate freedom of the public lands, but for the sake of those who remained East. This was the idea that he added to the idea of Andrew Jackson and Andrew Johnson. Theirs was the squatter's idea of the public domain—territory to be occupied and defended with a gun, because the occupant was on the ground. His was the idealistic view of the public domain—the natural right of all men to land, just as to sunlight, air and water. The workingmen of the East were slaves because their right to land was denied. They were slaves, not to individual masters like the negroes, but to a master class which owned their means of livelihood. Freedom of the public lands would be freedom for the white slave. Even the chattel slave would not be free if slavery were abolished without providing first that each freedman should have land of his own. Freedom of the public lands should be established before slavery was abolished.

These views were not original with Evans. They were the common property of his fellows, born of their common experience, formulated in their mutual intercourse and expressed in the platforms of their party and the resolutions of their trades' unions. Thus at the first convention of the National Trades' Union in 1834, one of the resolutions recited

that this Convention would the more especially reprobate the *sale* of the public lands, because of its injurious tendency as it affects the interests and independence of the laboring classes, inasmuch as it debars them from the occupation of any portion of the same, unless provided with an amount of capital which the greater portion of them, who would avail themselves of this aid to arrive at personal independence, cannot hope to attain, owing to the many encroachments made upon them through the reduction in the wages of labor consequent upon its surplus quantity in the market, which surplus would be drained off, and a demand for the produce of mechanical labor increased, if these public lands were left open to actual settlers.¹

¹ *The Man*, August 30, 1834.

But it was Evans, mainly, who gathered these ideas together and framed them into a system. He and his disciple, Lewis Masquerier, worked out the three cardinal points of a natural right: equality, inalienability, individuality.¹ Men have equal rights to land because each man is a unit. This right is inalienable: a man cannot sell or mortgage his natural right to land nor have it taken away from him for debt, any more than he can sell himself or be imprisoned for debt. This right belongs to the individual as such, not to corporations or associations. Here was his criticism of communism and Fourierism. Establish the individual right to the soil, and then men will be free to go into, or stay out of, communities as they please. Association will then be voluntary, not coercive, as Fourierism would make it. Thus did the communistic agrarianism of Thomas Spence and of the Working Men's Party of 1829 filter down into the individualistic idealism of American labor reform in 1844.

When the labor movement broke down with the panic of 1837, Evans retired to a farm in New Jersey, but kept his printing press. When the labor movement started up again in 1844, he returned to New York and again started his paper, the *Working Man's Advocate*, later changing the name to *Young America*. He and his friends organized a party known as National Reformers, and asked the candidates of all other parties to sign a pledge to vote for a homestead law. If no candidate signed, they placed their own tickets in the field. They printed pamphlets, one of which, *Vote Yourself a Farm*, was circulated by the hundred thousand. In 1845 they united with the New England Working Men's Association to call a national convention, which, under the name of the Industrial Congress, held sessions from 1845 to 1856. The one plank in the platform of the New England Working Men's Association had been a demand for a ten-hour law, and the two planks, land reform and ten hours for labor, were the platform of the Industrial Congress. Through the New England Association

¹ Reprinted in Masquerier, *Sociology, or the Reconstruction of Society, Government and Property* (New York, 1877), pp. 68 *et seq.*

the Brook Farmers and other Fourierists came into the land-reform movement.

It was in the latter part of 1845 that Greeley began to notice the homestead agitation. In the *Tribune*¹ he wrote an editorial beginning with his recollections of the workingmen's party which he had found fourteen years before when he came to New York. Now, he said, there had come into existence "a new party styled 'National Reformers' composed of like materials and in good part of the same men with the old Working Men's Party." He then describes their scheme of a homestead law and adds:

Its objects are, the securing to every man, as nearly as may be, a chance to work for and earn a living; secondly, the discouragement of land monopoly and speculation, and the creation of a universally land-holding People, such as has not been since the earlier and purer days of the Israelite Commonwealth. . . . Yet we are not prepared to give it our unqualified approval. The consequences of such a change must be immense. . . . We cannot see it lightly condemned and rejected. Will not those journals which have indicated hostility to this project oblige us by some real discussion of its merits? Calling it 'Agrarian,' and its advocates 'Empire-Club men' and 'Butt-Enders' . . . does not satisfy us, nor will it satisfy the people. . . .

Evans, in his *Young America*, commented on this editorial, and especially on Greeley's assertion that the reason why the workingmen's measures had not sooner attracted attention was that they had been put forth under what he called "unpopular auspices." Evans said:

All reforms are presented under "unpopular auspices," because they are presented by a minority who have wisdom to see and courage to avow the right in the face of unpopularity; and all reforms are pushed ahead by popularity-hunters as soon as the pioneers have cleared the way. I do not mean to class the editor of the *Tribune* amongst the popularity hunters, but simply to express a truth called forth by his rather equivocal designation of that enlightened and patriotic body of men who, if the history of this State and Union be ever truly written, will be prominent in it as the "Working Men's Party."²

¹ *Weekly Tribune*, November 29, 1845, p. 5, c. 5.

² *Young America*, November 29, 1845.

Five months later Greeley definitely committed himself to the workingmen's platform and to the reasoning with which they supported it.

The freedom of the public lands to actual settlers, and the limitation of future acquisitions of land to some reasonable amount, are also measures which seem to us vitally necessary to the ultimate emancipation of labor from thralldom and misery. What is mainly wanted is that each man should have an assured chance to earn, and then an assurance of the just fruits of his labors. We must achieve these results yet; we *can* do it. Every new labor-saving invention is a new argument, an added necessity for it. And, so long as the laboring class must live by working for others, while others are striving to live luxuriously and amass wealth out of the fruits of such labor, so long the abuses and sufferings now complained of must continue to exist or frequently reappear. We must go to the root of the evil.¹

From the date when Greeley took up the measure it advanced throughout the Northern States by rapid bounds. He used precisely the language and arguments of the *Working Man's Advocate*.

The National Reformers and the Industrial Congress had worked out logically three kinds of legislation corresponding to Evans's three cardinal points of man's natural right to the soil. These were land limitation, based on equality; homestead exemption, based on inalienability; freedom of the public lands, based on individuality.

In order that the rights of all might be equal the right of each must be limited. For the older states it was proposed that land limitation should take effect only on the death of the owner. Land was not to be inherited in larger quantities than 160 or 320 acres. Wisconsin was the only state in which this measure got as far as a vote in the legislature, that of 1851, where it was carried in the lower house by a majority of two votes but was defeated on a final vote.² The struggle was exciting and Greeley watched it eagerly. Then he wrote:

¹ *Weekly Tribune*, May 2, 1846, p. 3, c. 3.

² J. G. Gregory, "Land Limitation, A Wisconsin Episode of 1848 to 1851." *Parkman Club Papers*, vol. ii.

Well, this was the first earnest trial to establish a great and salutary principle; it will not be the last. It will yet be carried, and Wisconsin will not need half so many poorhouses in 1900 as she would have required if land limitation had never been thought of.¹

The measure was brought up in the New York legislature and was vigorously advocated by Greeley, but without decisive action.

The second kind of legislation, based on man's natural right to the soil, was homestead exemption. Projects of this class were far more successful than those looking to the limitation of holdings. Exemption legislation swept over all the states, beginning with Wisconsin in 1847,² but in mutilated form. The workingmen demanded absolute inalienability for each homestead, as complete as that of the nobility of Europe for each estate. But the laws actually enacted have not prohibited sale or mortgage of the homestead, as Evans proposed. They have merely prohibited levy and execution on account of debts not secured by mortgage. Voluntary alienation is allowed. Coercive alienation is denied. Greeley and the workingmen would have disallowed both.

Freedom of the public lands was the third sort of legislation demanded. Every individual not possessed of 160 acres of land should be free to get his equal share in fee simple out of the public domain without cost. The public domain, it was argued, belongs, not to the states nor to the collective people of all the states nor to the landowners and taxpayers of the states, but to each individual whose natural right has not as yet been satisfied. America is fortunate in having this vast domain unoccupied. Here all the cardinal points of a natural right can be legalized without damaging vested rights: individuality, by private property without cost; equality, by limitation to 160 acres; inalienability, by homestead exemption. This was the idealistic vision in 1844 of the Republican party's first great act in 1862.

¹ *Tribune*, March 27, 1851.

² The legislation of Texas in 1829 and 1837 was entirely different in character and motive. Somewhat similar laws had been adopted in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama and Florida prior to 1845 as a result of the panic of 1837.

Greeley espoused all of these measures. He himself introduced a homestead bill in Congress in 1848. He urged land limitation and homestead exemption upon the state legislatures. The *Tribune* carried his message throughout the North and prepared the mind of the people for the constructive work of the future.

I might speak of others who helped to carry the workingmen's idealism into Republican reality. I will mention only Galusha A. Grow, the "father of the Republican party," and Alvan E. Bovay, the disciple of Evans.

Galusha Grow's first great speech in Congress, in 1852, on Andrew Johnson's homestead bill, was printed by him under the title "Man's Right to the Soil," and was merely an oratorical transcript from the *Working Man's Advocate*.

The other less distinguished father was Alvan E. Bovay. For him has been claimed the credit of first suggesting to Greeley the name Republican party, and of bringing together under that name the first little group of men from the Whig, Democratic and Free Soil parties at Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1854.¹ Bovay had moved to Wisconsin in 1850. Before that time he had been associated with Evans and with the workingmen's party in New York, almost from its beginning in 1844. He was secretary, treasurer and delegate to the Industrial Congress. It was in New York that he became acquainted with Greeley. Bovay's speeches were reported at length in the *Working Man's Advocate* and *Young America*, and his letters frequently appeared in the *Tribune*. Whether he was the only father of the party or not, it is significant that it was these early views on the natural right to land, derived from Evans and the workingmen, that appeared in the Republican party wherever that party sprang into being. It is also an interesting fact that the workingmen were accustomed to speak of theirs as the true Republican party, and that Evans, in his paper in 1846, predicts that the National Reformers mark the beginning of the period when

¹ Curtis, *History of the Republican Party*, vol. i, p. 173. There were doubtless other spots of independent origin. See A. J. Turner, *Genesis of the Republican Party* (1898; pamphlet).

there "will be but two parties, the great Republican Party of Progress and the little Tory Party of Holdbacks."¹

Greeley also took up the ten-hour plank of the workingmen's party. Prior to 1845, under the influence of Fourierism, he had opposed labor legislation. In 1844 he wrote:

The relations of Labor and Capital present a vast theme, Government cannot intermeddle with them without doing great mischief. They are too delicate, complex and vitally important to be trusted to the clumsy handling of raw and shallow legislators. . . . The evils are Social, not Political, and are to be reached and corrected by Social remedies. . . . Legislation to correct such abuses can seldom do much good and will often do great harm. . . .²

His idea of the harmony of interests is seen in his hope that employers would reduce the hours of labor by agreement. "We do hope to see this year," he wrote in 1844, "a general convention of those interested in Factory Labor to fix and declare the proper hours of labor, which all shall respect and abide by. . . ."³ And when the first Industrial Congress was about to assemble he wrote:

An Industrial Congress, composed of representatives of Employers and Workmen, in equal numbers, ought to be assembled, to regulate generally the conditions of Labor. . . . A general provision, to operate co-extensively with the Union, that ten hours shall constitute a day's work, might be adopted without injury to any and with signal benefit to all. . . .⁴

After the Congress he wrote again:

We should greatly prefer that a satisfactory adjustment were arrived at without invoking the aid of the law-making power, except possibly in behalf of minors. We believe if the matter is only approached in the right way by those interested, discussed in the proper spirit, and pursued with reasonable earnestness and perseverance, that legislation will

¹ *Young America*, March 21, 1846, p. 2, c. 3.

² *Tribune*, January 25, 1844, p. 2, c. 1; February 16, 1844, p. 2, c. 2.

³ *Tribune*, February 16, 1844, p. 2, c. 1.

⁴ *Tribune*, September 30, 1845, p. 2, c. 1.

be found superfluous. . . . How many hours shall constitute a day's or a week's work should be settled in each department by a general council or congress of all interested therein, whose decision should be morally binding on all and respected by our Courts of Justice.¹

But, with the failure of the Industrial Congress to bring in the employers, Greeley aggressively adopted the legislative program of the workingmen and harmonized it with his theory of the protective tariff. Before this he had written:

If it be possible to interpose the power of the State beneficently in the adjustment of the relations of Rich und Poor, it must be evident that internal and not external measures like the Tariff, would be requisite. A tariff affects the relation of country with country and cannot reasonably be expected to make itself potently felt in the relations of class with class or individual with individuals.²

Two years afterward, when New Hampshire had adopted the first ten-hour law and the employers were violating it, he wrote:

That the owners and agents of factories should see this whole matter in a different light from that it wears to us, we deem unfortunate but not unnatural. It is hard work to convince most men that a change which they think will take five hundred or a thousand dollars out of their pockets respectively is necessary or desirable. We must exercise charity for the infirmities of poor human nature. But we have regretted to see in two or three of the Whig journals of New Hampshire indications of hostility to the Ten-Hour regulation, which we can hardly believe dictated by the unbiased judgment of their conductors. . . . What show of argument they contain is of the regular Free Trade stripe, and quite out of place in journals favorable to Protection. Complaints of legislative intermeddling with private concerns and engagements,—vociferations that Labor can take care of itself and needs no help from legislation—that the law of Supply and Demand will adjust this matter, &c., &c.—properly belong to journals of the opposite school. We protest against their unnatural and ill-omened appearance in journals of the true faith. . . . To talk of the Freedom of Labor, the policy of leaving it to make its own bargains, &c., when the fact is that a man who has a family to support and a house hired

¹ *Weekly Tribune*, December 27, 1845, p. 4, c. 4.

² *Weekly Tribune*, August 2, 1845, p. 3, c. 1.

for the year is told, 'If you will work thirteen hours per day, or as many as we think fit, you can stay; if not, you can have your walking papers: and well you know that no one else hereabout will hire you' —is it not most egregious flummery?'¹

The foregoing quotations from Greeley depict the evolution of the theory of the protective tariff out of the Whig theory into the Republican theory. The Whig idea was protection for the sake of capital. Greeley's idea was protection for the sake of labor. The Whigs did not approve of Greeley, but his theory was useful in 1840, and in that year they hired him to get out campaign literature. At that time he was a higher idealist, a transcendentalist, a zealot for harmony of interests, and believed that capitalists would voluntarily coöperate with labor and need not be coerced by legislation. He was disabused of this notion when he saw the way in which employers treated the ten-hour movement. Whatever the workingmen had gained on this point they had gained against the Whigs, through Jackson, Van Buren and the Democrats. Modifying his faith in harmony of interests, he took up legislation in behalf of class interests and rounded out a theory of labor legislation by the states to supplement protective tariff legislation by Congress. This became the Republican theory of protection in place of the dying Whig theory. True, the Republican party has not always lived up to this theory; but its defection is a further illustration of the American practice of using a theory of human rights to augment property rights. And, after all, it has been the Republican states that have led the way in labor legislation.

I have attempted to sketch the origin and evolution of the two species of idealism that struggled for existence in this epoch of American history. This biology of ideas exhibits both an adaptation to and a rejection of the contemporaneous economic development. The transcendentalism of New England, with its humanized God and its deified man, was rather a protest against than a product of the new economics. As the years advanced and industrial anarchy deepened, the protest

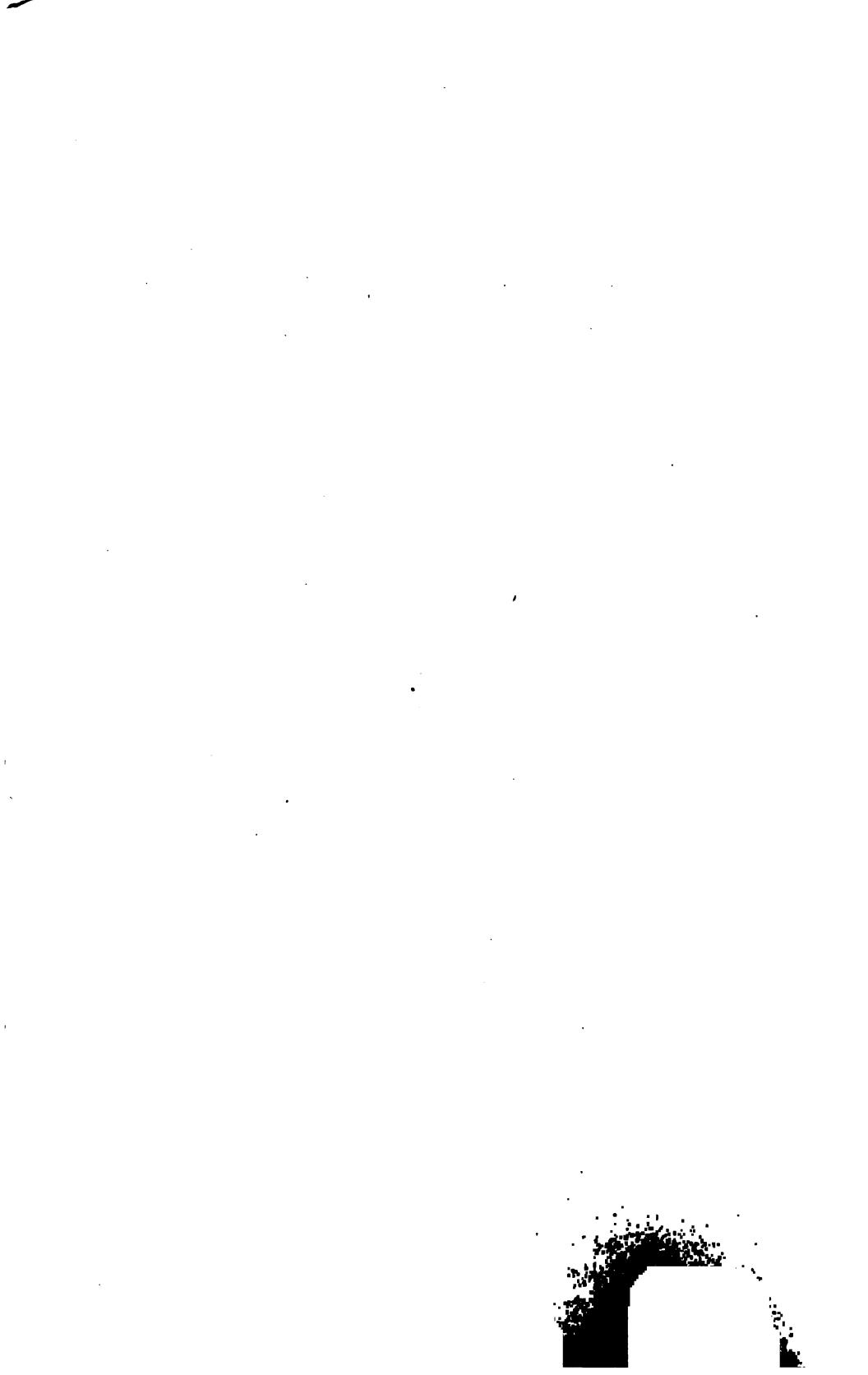
¹ *Weekly Tribune*, September 18, 1847, p. 5, c. 2.

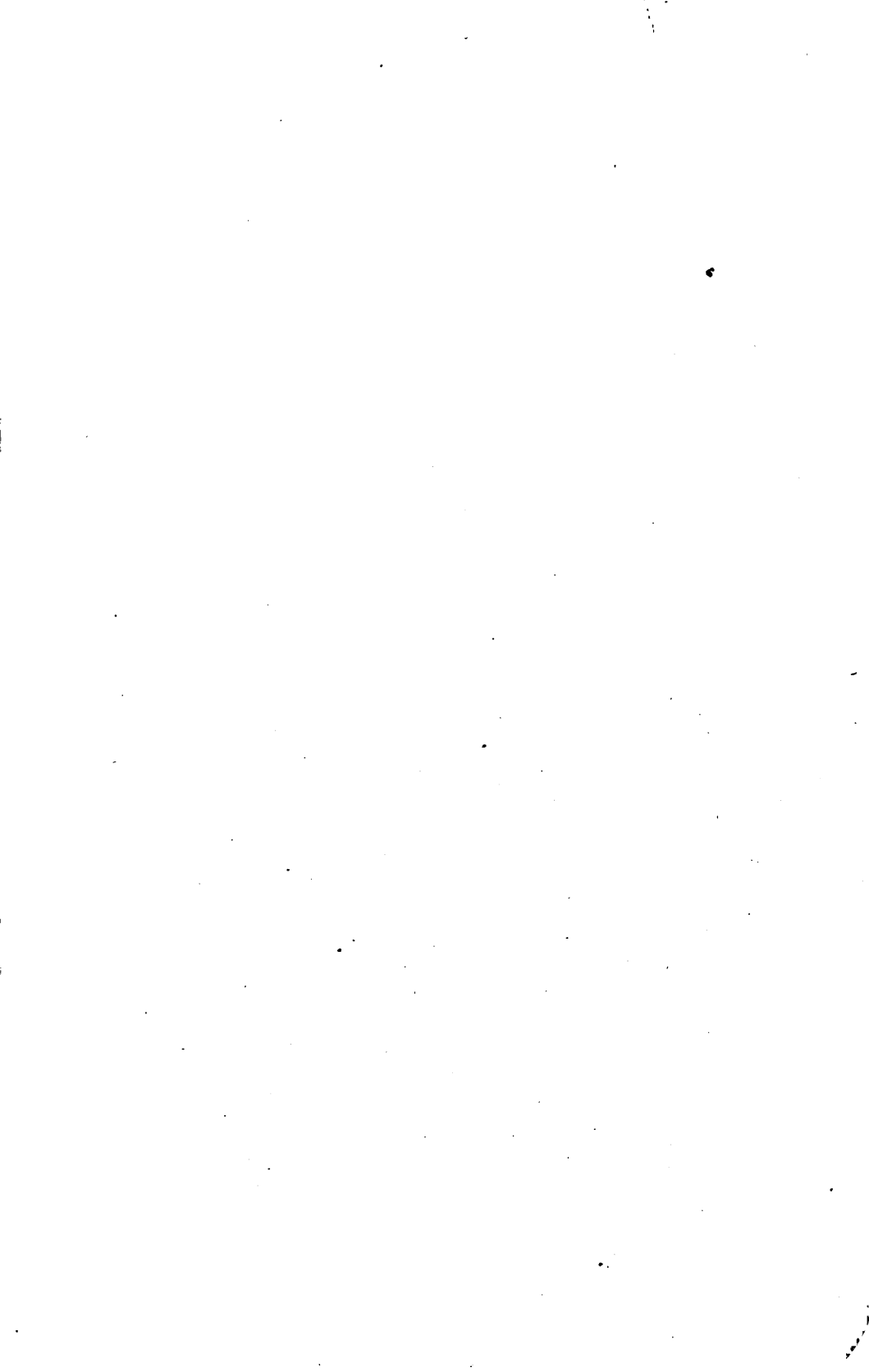
turned to reconstruction. But the tools and materials for the new structure were not politics and legislation, but an idealized, transcendental workingman. Transcendentalism resurrected man, but not the real man. It remained for the latter, the man in the struggle, to find his own way out. By failure and success, by defeat, by victory often fruitless, he felt along the line of obstacles for the point of least resistance. But he, too, needed a philosophy. Not one that would idealize him, but one that would help him win a victory. Shorter hours of labor, freedom to escape from economic oppression, these were the needs that he felt. His inalienable "natural right" to life, liberty, land and the products of his own labor—this was his philosophy. Politics and legislation were his instruments.

It is easy to show that "natural rights" are a myth, but they are, nevertheless, a fact of history. It was the workingmen's doctrine of natural rights that enabled the squatter to find an idealistic justification for seizing land and holding it in defiance of law. "Natural right," here as always, was the effective assailant of legal right. Had it not been for this theoretic setting, our land legislation might have been piecemeal and opportunist like the English—merely a temporizing concession to the squatters on account of the difficulty of subduing them by armed force. Such an opportunist view, without the justification of natural rights, could not have aroused enthusiasm nor created a popular movement nor furnished a platform for a political party. The Republican party was not an anti-slavery party. It was a homestead party. On this point its position was identical with that of the workingmen. Only because slavery could not live on one-hundred-and-sixty-acre farms did the Republican party come into conflict with slavery.

Thus has the idealism of American history both issued from and counteracted its materialism. The editorial columns of the *Tribune* from 1841 to 1854 are its documentary records. There we see the two main currents of idealism passing through the brain of Greeley and coming out a constructive program for the reorganization of society.

JOHN R. COMMONS.





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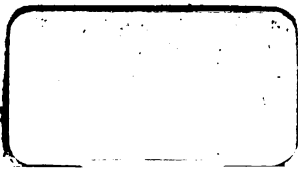
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